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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D. C. 20520

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April 18, 1979

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

TO: HA - Ms. Patt Derian

THROUGH: HA - Mark L. Schneider
HA/HR - Charles B. Salmon, Jr.

FROM: HA/HR - Patrick J. Flood

SUBJECT: Argentina: The Atmosphere -- Personal
Notes

I have never been so glad to leave a place in my life. There is a real reign of terror in that country, and I felt myself living under it. I was under surveillance by plain-clothes security agents during at least the last two days and nights--and maybe earlier. Knowing their readiness to eliminate anyone who represents a threat, however remote, to what they are doing--and knowing that they were fully aware of who I am and what I represent--an operativo against me did not seem out of the question. It was not with great reassurance then, that I saw, parked across the street from my hotel, a Falcon occupied by four plain-clothesmen. (Almost all of the disappearances have featured a Falcon full of heavies.) Or a fellow standing across the street from the Embassy, fooling around in the trunk of his car for a long time, engrossed in busy-work until I appeared. Then he stopped and stared at me while I waited for one of the Madres de la Plaza to leave the Embassy and walk with me to the church where they were meeting that day. The same fellow, or one who resembled him a lot, was waiting outside the restaurant where I ate on Thursday night. When he saw me, he looked over my shoulder and casually but immediately raised his hand to scratch his ear. Then he just sort of shambled around in place while I walked past.

But I slept well enough anyway, thanks mainly to the fatigue induced by a heavy schedule.

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My concerns were heightened by the stories I heard from Argentine ex-desaparecidos and relatives of desaparecidos, tales which would make your hair stand on end. I had also heard high military officials tell me why the "dirty war" justified extreme measures, and why they did not see the war completely over yet. And I had seen, on two occasions, a truckload of armed soliders and an Army car heading, an Embassy officer told me, for an operativo--in this case an open one--to seal off an area for document checks. Uniformed police also sometimes stopped cars on a particular street for such checks. (I am not suggesting that the latter two checks necessarily lead to abduction, but they indicate the kind of atmosphere prevailing in Buenos Aires.) Another case: a week or two ago, troops or police (I do not recall which) visited every apartment in a particular area to check the documents of all residents and to make notes of this. The reason given was that "a high government official is going to move into the neighborhood". Maybe so, and maybe this is just a routine precaution--but it symbolizes a certain attitude in the power structure.

People working in human rights organizations have been harassed by phone and visit in recent weeks. It is unsettling, but it has not paralyzed the organization's efforts. There are a lot of brave people in Argentina and, I sense, a growing number of others who believe the time has come to get involved in dealing with human rights issues.

FOOTNOTE: A closed trailer appeared at the Embassy at the time the NYC Bar Association arrived, and remained throughout my stay. It is a movie van. A similar van appeared at the time of your last visit and was removed when you left.

Drafted by: HA/HR:PJFlood:bdr
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